

occult e-books leading edge occult and alternative paradigm thinking

[home](#)
[books](#)
[articles](#)
[interviews](#)
[reviews](#)
[forum](#)
[links](#)

essays & articles



Grades in Occult Societies

Kate Hoolu

After the (generally!) encouraging response to my somewhat tongue-in-cheek other article "[How is a secret society constructed](#)", this is a more serious look at sociology with some side-reference to occult groups. One of the responses to that article (in the [forum](#)) pointed out the existence of one occult order run on Marxist lines, to be [found here](#), and on a first look they seem very interesting.

Grading, or to give it the more correct sociological term, stratification is derived from the geological term meaning a system of arranged distinct layers (strata) in rock formations. In sociology these "layers" are groups who share some common factor or factors, which can be used to differentiate them from other groups.

Stratification can be by racial group, gender, age, social class etc; and unlike the fixed nature of the geology, some strata at least are changeable; for example social class, or attainment within an occult order. Also many strata (for example age groups) are far less distinct than a change from granite to sand, but however inexact, the rock metaphor is used throughout this essay for convenience.

Sociologists are generally split into three main camps when looking at stratification; the Marxists, Weberians and Functionalists.

A summary of functionalism would (in brief) point out the observed coexistence of social phenomena and interrelation of groups, beliefs and morals in society; which is seen as a "seamless web". There is no distinction made as to what is a cause and what is an effect of this relationship. Also important is the organicist metaphor (from Herbert Spencer, which owes much to anthropology; the first critique of this is that many tribes or occult orders differ, but continue to work well as societies for which functionalism can offer no explanation, at all). Society is seen as a pattern of functionally interrelated variables (from Talcott Parsons) with a scheme of functional analysis for each, and the concept of fundamental norms and values.

The leading early thinker of functionalism, Emile Durkheim believed that a society remains coherent and cohesive ("healthy") due to the consensus will of the majority. Functionalists approve of, if not positively welcome stratification, it is seen as an inevitable and vital part of their system; being a prerequisite of social order and function. By the common (or majority) holding of this set of traditional consensuses that are agreed to be normal this allows society to run smoothly. From this comes the structural theory, that society is composed of sub-groups, i.e. classes (such as neophyte, practicus, etc); and that these form the building blocks of the society. The geological metaphor could be extended here to a quarrying operation where the raw rock of different qualities are removed from the earth and arranged in a particular designed order.

Durkheim believed that a society functioned as an amalgamation of its groups into a synergetic, holistic totality; the organicist metaphor of a body with separate specialised organs etc. To continue this metaphor, he believed that one group had to be the "brain" (i.e. be in conscious and perceived control) in order to prevent chaos and regulate the other functions (other strata-groups).

This is the functionalist justification (and overt approval) for stratification; somebody has to be in charge; there have to be levels of merit, and the functionalists' initial value consensus of norms, i.e. which groups are more important is by nature hierarchical. With importance comes power, authority and thus control. So long as someone is in control then bodies (i.e. economic societies) work smoothly and efficiently; major change within the society is seen as dangerous, as it implies (metaphorical) disease or death of the smoothly-running organism. This death or disease is obviously to be avoided at all costs under functionalism; the essence of "good health", metaphorical or magical, implied by a widely stratified system was most desirable, being 'a place for everything and everything in its' place'.

As a critique from the Marxist school however, function (if not an historical accident which just so conveniently happens to work) is held to imply design, hence a designer and a pre-ordained function. The stratification is often intimately allied to or dependent upon the function. The function of each strata has been set up for a purpose; which could be a consensus aim, or to satisfy a pre-arranged motive that is not held by the majority. There is not always a definable purpose to all functions, especially in a complex magical society and often those carrying out the function do not gain any (or all of) the benefit which may accrue from the action; often their function largely or totally DEFINES their strata.

Whether one chooses to see the designer as God or as a mortal there are theoretical problems; if it is from the Divine then the roles of all in each strata are pre-ordained and it would be heresy to wish to change. This makes no value judgment between those of any strata, unlike Marxism.

It is unlikely that any sociological theory depending largely or wholly on the existence of, and understanding of the motives of a God or Gods would be well received in an environment where sociology is attempting to be viewed as a science. This makes it a difficult technique to use on magical orders. Sociology, or at least Functionalism would largely become another religion, and another means of stratification is via religious belief, a vicious circle. Fortunately, as mentioned earlier, some change of strata is possible (and Marxism denies the existence of God anyway) so is time to thankfully consider the latter, and more likely possibility, that the designer of the class structure and other means of stratification was mortal.

Since it seems rather unlikely that anyone would design a social structure in which their particular group fell to the LEAST favourable strata, the Marxist view holds that stratification is an invention of those already of the top strata (Magi) to keep the lower strata (neophytes) in their already disadvantaged place, thus perpetuating the differentiation of magical society for reasons of a power dynamic -to the benefit of the occult equivalent of capitalist-industrial structures assisted by arbitrary means of government which deny the chance for social change towards communism. Indeed functionalism has no coherent theory to explain the mechanisms or reasons for social change, hence does not allow it; considering it an illness. Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the Marxist arguments against it, functionalism on the whole reflects a Conservative bias; ... a la Edmund Burke's view of the ruling class and their noblesse oblige to the poor; while at the same time keeping them in their lowly place with the hegemonic tool of religion.

The rise (and fall) of the Trade Union movement on Marxist lines under capitalism is an example of where stratification can cause immense harm to a capitalist industrial society; through the financial (and morale) expenses of strikes, higher wage demands and general labour unrest; this happens due to the circulated knowledge amongst the working classes of a stratified system, rather than the existence of the system itself. A metaphor for the formation of the Illuminates of Thanateros, perhaps?

Social Action theories derive largely from Max Weber; who believed that society comes about almost spontaneously as an aggregate of escalating social interactions between progressively larger groups. This eventually leads to the formation of strata. When a strata becomes large enough it can then influence the behaviour of those in other strata; and also the behaviour of itself; by perpetuation of consensus views; or perhaps (negatively) the stereotypes of itself; such as the media image in the UK of the cloth-cap wearing working-class northerner who keeps pigeons in his back garden and coal in the bath, which although still circulated must be some decades out of date by now, if it was ever remotely true.

Weber had broad agreements with some aspects of functionalism, including the need for someone to be in control; but his main critique of the functionalists is that little account was taken of the social and political implications of their (largely economic) ideas; and that functionalism was a rather one-dimensional view of an infinitely complex inter-related system of disparate influences such as social status (as distinct from pure class) and political belief; Weber saw differences between class (i.e. magical grade) and social status (i.e. importance of their function in that grade) Hence there were too many holes in the logic of Durkheim and his followers for Weber to accept functionalism; he was more allied to Marx, although Marx's class conflict was modified under Weber to class interaction and influence; i.e. more two-way and unpredictable.

Stratification by virtually any means can be seen as highly negative and divisive; giving rise to stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and jealousy (in both directions on the scale of strata). In this century the practical implications of the stratification of Jews, Gypsies, other minority ethnic groups and the mentally handicapped as the "Untermensch" by the German Nazi party led to the deaths of over 8 million people. Unfortunately for all of his attractive theories, Max Weber

has been implicated, perhaps unfairly, as the author of the social plans which later enabled Hitler to assume power over Germany and put the whole idea into operation.

There are continuing problems with stratification in that groups which are identified as "different" in some way, however spurious, are then treated differently; on a physiological level Britain still has the highest death toll from heart disease in the world and that there is a wide, and widening gap in cardiac mortality rates across Britain between rich and poor. The statistics show that the death rate from heart disease for men living in the north of England is 25 per cent higher than in the South-east and 28 per cent higher for women; a reflection of the class-related "north-south divide" perhaps? It would seem so; among men, it is about 40 per cent higher for manual workers than non-manual workers. The death rate for the wives of manual workers is about twice as high as for wives of non-manual workers; which may be dietary, or financially related; although this is far too complex an area to simply assign to one cause.

This ties in with my social survey [piece here](#): in that the common indicator of cancer rates related to class is also flawed as it assumes that "cancer" is one disease, whereas there are over 100 types. In much the same way that Brie and Cheddar are both cheeses with different qualities, the causes of cancer can be hugely varied. Indeed there are certainly apparent links with the (assumed) generally lower-class tendency to smoke; and hence increases in the risk of lung cancer: but equally there are cancers that tend to affect only those of other groups which are either not class-related or go across class (and other group) lines.

Sir Douglas Black, President of the UK's Royal College of Physicians, produced an extensive report for the Dept of Health in 1980; concluding that for every age group (infants, children and adults); for every illness (heart disease, cancer, strokes and accidents), there is a predictable and consistent social class gradient, with the unskilled faring on average twice as badly as the professional middle class. Black's report favoured poverty as "the most likely explanation". The result, it calculated, was the untimely loss of 75,000 lives a year. However it should be mentioned that the sword of class division cuts both ways. A report by the Samaritans in 1993 said that a rise in suicides among men from the highest social class is being fuelled by pressure to succeed – ie to not be poverty-stricken- and their reluctance to discuss their feelings because it might adversely affect their careers, but that unemployment and poverty may be responsible for an increase in male suicides in the lowest social class.

A parallel in the behaviour of those fighting to stay at the top of various magical orders, anyone?

It would appear that there is still great debate over the desirability and usefulness of stratification, but very little disagreement over its deep entrenchment into Western industrial society. The latter point rather defuses any debate on inevitability; we are being asked after the event, with no other industrial society without a stratified system to give comparison. The soundbyte of a classless society, however idealised and desired by some, would seem to be virtually impossible in the magical order, let alone wider society- Indeed 80% of the UK populace believe that a classless society is a non-starter, and social class-ownership of capital is still heavily reflected by political stance; which tends to maintain the system that services the needs of the voters, hence majority concentrations of a particular strata in any given constituency ensure the political voice of that area in parliament.

The communism of the former USSR from 1917-1990 can arguably be held as an example of a successful non-stratified industrial nation; but the relative levels of industrial success (expressed as average standard of living improvement for the entire population) must be taken into account, and also the inner stratification which became entrenched almost immediately, with major party figures quickly taking up second homes in the rural hunting lodges and personal fortunes being made from dealings with capitalist economies. There was no non-stratified vacuum in which to operate, indeed on a visit to the west in the 1980s Russian premier Gorbachev became especially newsworthy for going shopping using his American Express Gold card; an expensive status symbol that (relatively) few in the stratified West possessed, let alone many of his comrades in the USSR.

Even the Israeli kibbutz system, which houses and employs about 4-6% of the population in an overtly communist manner within an industrial-mechanised agricultural nation shows a defined (and often ill-tempered) split into workers and organisers. It could perhaps be seen as an interesting experiment without being able to gain too much sociological theory that could be applied on a larger scale.

One would need to set up an entirely new society in order to avoid stratification;

or take some very extreme steps in social re-planning to eradicate it from a current society. Apart from the practical difficulties it poses the philosophical problem of one person (or group) coercing all other groups to not be of that group any more... were it to be a voluntary matter there would be dissenters (hence another strata!).

The very difficulties of either of those choices would seem to imply that stratification, however undesirable to many, is hugely inevitable in any society. Similarly in an occult order. Or you can work as a solo practitioner....

Difficult choice? Not for me!

KH

- **About the author**
- **Comment in the forum**

Articles of 500-1000 words or so from any contributor on suitable topics are always welcome. Please email these to [Katherine](#)

[back](#)

[top](#)

[home](#) | [books](#) | [articles](#) | [links](#) | [resources](#) | [buy books](#) | [contact us](#) | [privacy](#) | [legal](#)



Leading edge occult and alternative paradigm thinking in handy e-book format